

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 157210

FOL RPT BANGKOK 17356 SENT ACTION SECSTATE INFO CANBERRA, GENEVA,
KUALA LUMPUR & TAIPEI DTD 16 JUN 78

QUOTE: C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 17356

E.O. 11652: N/A

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SUBJECT: INDOCHINESE REFUGEES: LOWMAN'S MEETING WITH MAJOR
GENERAL SISAK THAMMARAK

REF: STATE 151574

1. SUMMARY: SISAK IS THE DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY OF
INTERIOR CHARGED WITH HANDLING THE INDOCHINESE REFUGEE
PROBLEM, AMONG OTHER DUTIES. LOWMAN AND THE REFUGEE
COORDINATOR MET WITH HIM JUNE 15. THE DISCUSSION CENTER-
ED ON LOCAL SETTLEMENT, IN PARTICULAR THE U.S. OFFER
OF TWO MILLION DOLLARS SEED MONEY FOR EXPLORING THIS
POSSIBILITY. LOWMAN NOTED THAT ALTHOUGH THIS SUM COULD
BE EXTENDED THROUGH BILATERAL OR MULTILATERAL CHANNELS,
A LARGER PROJECT THAT MIGHT EMERGE FROM IT WOULD REQUIRE
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INTERNATIONAL FUNDING AND WOULD BEST BE COORDINATED
THROUGH THE UNHCR. LOWMAN POSED THE QUESTION WHETHER
AMERICAN COMPANIES COULD RECRUIT REFUGEE LABOR IN
THAILAND FOR WORK ABROAD, AND EVENTUALLY RETURN THE
INDIVIDUALS TO THAILAND. SISAK RESPONDED POSITIVELY,
BUT SAID HE WOULD HAVE TO GET PRIME MINISTERIAL
CLEARANCE. END SUMMARY.

2. WE BEGAN BY EXPLAINING THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THAILAND OF THE NEW PAROLE THAT THE ATTORNEY GENERAL AUTHORIZED JUNE 14 (REFTEL). SISAK EXPRESSED HIS APPRECAITION FOR THE NEW PROGRAM, AND SAID HE WOULD INFORM HIS SUPERIORS IMMEDIATELY.

3. HE THEN POSED QUESTIONS ABOUT WHY SO MANY REFUGEES APPROVED UNDER IPP-77 AND IPP-78 HAD NOT YET LEFT THAILAND. WE EXPLAINED THAT WE EXPECTED ANOTHER 1800 TO LEAVE DURING JUNE, AND THAT MONTHLY DEPARTURES SHOULD CONTINUE AT A HIGH RATE THROUGHOUT THE REST OF THE YEAR.

4. LOWMAN ASKED SISAK ABOUT THAI PLANS FOR LOCAL SETTLEMENT. SISAK SAID THAT THE THAI PREFERRED TO CALL THAT PROCESS "RELOCATION." HE CONTENDED THAT IT WAS A QUESTION OF FROM 15 TO 20 YEARS HENCE, BY WHICH TIME THE NUMBER OF REFUGEES IN THAILAND WOULD BE REDUCED TO THE ONE OR TWO THOUSAND THAT NO ONE ELSE WOULD TAKE. FURTHER PROBING ON THAT QUESTION LED TO NO CHANGE IN SISAK'S STATED POSITION. THEREAFTER, SISAK NEVERTHELESS SHOWED A LIVELY INTEREST IN VARIOUS ASPECTS OF U.S. POLICY RELATIVE TO LOCAL SETTLEMENT.

5. SISAK ASKED LOWMAN ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE VICE PRESIDENT'S PROPOSAL OF TWO MILLION DOLLARS FOR
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STUDY OF LOCAL SETTLEMENT. LOWMAN REPLIED THAT IT COULD BE USED FOR FEASIBILITY STUDIES, OR POSSIBLY FOR PILOT PROJECTS. WE HAD NO PRECONCEPTIONS ABOUT HOW THESE FUNDS SHOULD BE USED, OR HOW THE THAI SHOULD BEST PROCEED. OUR INTENTION WAS TO BE RESPONSIVE TO ANY INITIATIVES THEY MIGHT WISH TO TAKE ON THIS SUBJECT. IF THEY WOULD FIND IT USEFUL TO CONDUCT FEASIBILITY STUDIES ON SUCH MATTERS AS LAND DEVELOPMENT OR OTHERWISE OBTAIN THE SERVICES OF EXPERTS, WE COULD BE RESPONSIVE. SINCE THIS AMOUNT WOULD BE IN EXCESS OF WHAT MIGHT BE USED FOR FEASIBILITY STUDIES ALONE, WE COULD ALSO CONSIDER PROPOSALS FOR PILOT PROJECTS DESIGNED TO TEST THE FEASIBILITY OF CERTAIN APPROACHES TO LOCAL SETTLEMENT.

6. THIS ASSISTANCE COULD BE MADE AVAILABLE THROUGH EITHER BILATERAL OR MULTILATERAL CHANNELS, IN THE LATTER CASE THROUGH THE UNHCR. IN EITHER CASE IT WOULD BE IMPORTANT TO INCLUDE UNHCR REPRESENTATIVES IN ANY DISCUSSIONS, SINCE THE FUNDING FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A RESULTANT LARGER PROJECT WOULD HAVE TO COME FROM INTERNATIONAL SOURCES AND BE COORDINATED THROUGH THE UNHCR. IF TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF THIS MATTER WERE TO BE DIS-

CUSSED, IT WOULD ALSO BE DESIRABLE TO HAVE AID OFFICERS PRESENT. IF THE RTG DESIRED, SUCH DISCUSSIONS COULD OCCUR WHEN LOWMAN RETURNS TO BANGKOK ON JULY 2. IF THEY WISH TO WAIT UNTIL A LATER DATE, THAT ALTERNATIVE WAS ENTIRELY UP TO THEM AND OUR OFFER TO BE OF ASSISTANCE WOULD REMAIN OPEN.

7. SISAK NOTED THAT THE RTG HAD A PROBLEM WITH MANY IMPOVERISHED THAI. THEY MIGHT BE JEALOUS OF SPECIAL ATTENTION PAID TO THE REFUGEES. LOWMAN RESPONDED THAT WE RECOGNIZE THIS PROBLEM. HE NOTED THAT, DURING DISCUSSIONS IN GENEVA, UNHCR OFFICIALS HAD SUGGESTED THAT PROJECTS MIGHT BE IMPLEMENTED WHICH WOULD INVOLVE JOINT RELOCATION OF INDIGENT THAI AND REFUGEES. SISAK IN-
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DICATED GENERAL AGREEMENT WITH THIS PROPOSITION AS A WAY OF PROCEEDING SOMETIME IN THE FUTURE.

8. IN DISCUSSIONS OF HOW SUCH A PROJECT MIGHT PROCEED, LOWMAN NOTED THAT A RATHER FORMIDABLE COORDINATION PROBLEM MIGHT BE POSED. RELOCATION OF THAI COULD INVOLVE BILATERAL ASSISTANCE FROM THE VARIOUS TECHNICAL MISSIONS, SUCH AS AID, THE GERMANS, JAPANESE, AND OTHERS. LOCAL SETTLEMENT OF REFUGEES WOULD INVOLVE NUMEROUS INPUTS FROM FOREIGN DONORS, PROBABLY COORDINATED THROUGH THE UNHCR. WHILE CERTAINLY NOT INSUPERABLE, THE COORDINATION OF SUCH INPUTS INTO A SINGLE, EFFICIENTLY IMPLEMENTED PACKAGE WOULD REQUIRE CONTINUING HIGH LEVEL ATTENTION WITHIN THE RTG. SISAK INDICATED INTEREST IN THESE COMMENTS, AND NOTED THAT HE WOULD PASS THEM ON TO HIS SUPERIORS.

9. SISAK NOTED THAT ONE PROBLEM WITH LOCAL SETTLEMENT OF THE REFUGEES WAS THE SUBSTANTIAL LACK OF SKILLS OF THE REFUGEES REMAINING IN THAILAND. IN THIS CONNECTION LOWMAN SAID THAT A NUMBER OF U.S. COMPANIES OPERATING ABROAD HAD SUGGESTED THAT THEY MIGHT BE INTERESTED IN RECRUITING LABOR FROM THE THAI REFUGEE CAMPS TO WORK IN AREAS SUCH AS THE MIDDLE EAST ON A LIMITED TERM CONTRACT. THESE REFUGEES WOULD RETURN TO THAILAND UPON COMPLETION OF THE CONTRACT. THUS, THAILAND DOES NOT GAIN ANYTHING FROM SUCH A PROGRAM IN TERMS OF ADDITIONAL RESETTLEMENT ABROAD. THERE ARE BENEFITS TO THAILAND, HOWEVER, IN UPGRADING THE SKILLS OF THE REFUGEES, SINCE SIGNIFICANT TRAINING WOULD BE INVOLVED. ONE COULD ALSO EXPECT SUBSTANTIAL REMITTANCES OF FOREIGN EXCHANGE INTO THE REFUGEE COMMUNITY. SISAK INDICATED CONSIDERABLE INTEREST IN THIS IDEA, AND SAID HE INTENDED TO PROPOSE
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IT TO THE PRIME MINISTER.

10. SISAK SAID THAT HE HAD HEARD THAT THE VICE PRESIDENT HAD PROPOSED THAT TAIWAN ACCEPT VIETNAMESE REFUGEES CURRENTLY IN TAIWAN. LOWMAN REPLIED THAT THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE WAS DISCUSSING WITH THE GROC THE POSSIBILITY OF TAKING ETHNIC CHINESE REFUGEES FROM VIETNAM WHO ARE NOW IN THAILAND, BUT THAT NO CONCLUSIONS HAD BEEN REACHED.

11. COMMENT: SISAK WAS ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT THE NEW PROGRAM FOR ACCEPTANCE OF INDOCHINESE REFUGEES FROM THAILAND, BUT PESSIMISTIC ABOUT AN EARLY TIME FRAME FOR THE RTG TO BEGIN LOCAL SETTLEMENT. HE NEVERTHELESS SEEMED MORE INTERESTED THAN ANY OTHER THAI REFUGEE OFFICIAL WITH WHOM WE HAVE TALKED ON THE SUBJECT OF THE U.S. OFFER OF SEED MONEY FOR LOCAL SETTLEMENT. SISAK DID NOT LEAVE THE IMPRESSION, HOWEVER, THAT THE RTG IS ABOUT TO LAUNCH INTO LOCAL SETTLEMENT. WHITEHOUSE UNQUOTE VANCE

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